

# Promise, Peril of Fracking Detailed by 60 Minutes Report

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Last night, the CBS news program 60 Minutes took a look at the gas drilling process known as **hydraulic fracturing, or fracking**. In addition to looking at some of the "advantages" of fracking for natural gas, the 60 Minutes segment also looked at the environmental worries linked with this type of natural gas drilling.

"In the last few years, we've discovered the equivalent of two Saudi Arabias of oil in the form of natural gas in the United States. Not one, but two," Aubrey McClendon, the CEO of Chesapeake Energy, told "60 Minutes" correspondent Lesley Stahl. Stahl glowingly reported that there are shale formations across large parts of the country, and there is production or exploration in over 30 states. At one point, she refers to the fracking boom as an "American Energy Renaissance."

Fracking, the process used to extract that gas from shale, involves injecting water, sand, and a cocktail of chemicals at high pressure into rock formations thousands of feet below the surface.

According to Stahl's report, shale drilling generated almost \$6 billion in Louisiana in new household earnings last year. Much of the drilling is taking place in northwest Louisiana, in some of the poorest communities in the country. Some 10,000 wells are slated to be drilled in that area alone. In Louisiana and many other parts of the country, fracking is now a fact of life near homes and farms.

Of course, the drilling boom hasn't been good news for everyone. As the 60 Minutes report points out, the industry has racked up thousands of accidents and safety violations. In Louisiana, for example, 17 cows grazing near a Chesapeake drilling site died a gruesome death after drinking fracking fluids that ran off into their pasture.

In addition to the shaleionaires, Stahl interviewed property owners who say fracking has ruined their land and tainted their water supplies. Tim and Christine Ruggiero's, who live near Decatur, Texas, don't own the mineral rights to their land, so they could do nothing when Aruba Petroleum drilled two wells outside their home. The couple showed Stahl a tank on their land leaking some type of fluid. When the state environmental agency shot video of hissing toxic air emissions with infrared cameras, the company was hit with a fine.

On the Ruggieros' land, there were problems involving the gas company's equipment: valves weren't tightened; a tank, left unattended, overflowed; fluids spilled from a frack container. They are now suing Aruba Petroleum.

Stahl also visited Dimock, Pennsylvania, which she termed the "ghost town" of the fracking boom. Cabot Oil and Gas paid many of the people in Dimock \$25 an acre to drill there. Then one day, a well exploded. Now, many Dimock residents can light their tap water on fire because it is contaminated with flammable methane gas. Pennsylvania regulators ultimately determined that gas leaked into the water because of a poor cement job. Cabot now supplies bottled water to the residents, and the state is forcing it to pay to pipe municipal water from a nearby town to Dimock. Many residents are suing the driller, but Cabot continues to deny it is to blame for Dimock's problems.

"This is a poor area. This is the perfect place to come in and drill. A lot of guys didn't have work. Now they're driving trucks. The bars are hopping, the rentals are full." Victoria Switzer, a Dimock resident told Stahl. "So there is an economic boom here, but at what price?"

"So what we need to do is we need to promote gas as a cleaner alternative to coal and oil, but hold the industry accountable for tighter standards," he said.